

*Mets Owner and Founder of "Welcome Back Veterans," Fred Wilpon, Top NY National Guard General, Assistant Surgeon General From the Pentagon, VA Officials and Experts Discuss Mental Health Issues for Veterans and Soldiers Returning from Deployment*

Huntington, NY— Thursday, Congressmen Steve Israel (D-LI) and Tim Bishop (D-LI) joined with Mets Owner Fred Wilpon (Founder of "Welcome Back Veterans"), officials from the VA, the National Guard, the Pentagon, the Rosen Family Wellness Center-North Shore LIJ, and veterans to discuss mental health treatment issues for veterans and soldiers returning from deployment, specifically Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As many as 1 in 5 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD, but only half receive treatment. The panel discussed ways to improve treatment and increase treatment options for veterans and returning service members. The panel also discussed ways that the federal government can partner with private medical centers to more quickly expand the body of knowledge on PTSD and establish best practices in fighting this insidious disease.

"PTSD is a psychological issue, but it is no less real and significant than any other war wound," Israel said. "The impact of PTSD on our troops, veterans and their families is severe and we must do a better job of addressing it. There are treatments that can help, but unfortunately the majority go without treatment. I am working with the people here today to ensure that soldiers and veterans afflicted with PTSD are properly diagnosed, and that any sort of stigma doesn't stand in the way of life-saving treatment."

"The invisible wounds of war leave scars as severe, and long lasting, as physical battlefield injuries," said Congressman Tim Bishop. "Sometimes the hardest thing for a brave servicemember to do is ask for help; we must work harder to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health counseling, and make sure the resources and expertise are there for our veterans when they need it."

Joe Sledge from the Northport VA, said, "No one goes to war and comes home unaffected. As with older generations of veterans, VA can help the country's newest generation of heroes live healthier and fulfilling lives."

More than 2 million troops have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. A 2008 study by RAND, estimated that 1 in 5 veterans returning from these wars suffer from PTSD, but only half receive treatment. The social cost of untreated PTSD is high.

Suicide is often linked to PTSD, often seen as the final consequence of not diagnosing and/or treating PTSD properly. The Army had the highest number of suicides ever in June 2010. A report released by the Army on suicides showed that in 2009 the Army had 239 suicide deaths, not including 146 active duty deaths related to high risk behavior including 74 drug overdoses. There were also 1,713 known attempted suicides in the same period. Of all the services the Army and Marine Corps have experienced the largest increase in suicide rates reflecting the fact that the Army and the Marine Corps have been taxed with the responsibility of fighting the two ground wars.

The most common treatment for PTSD is therapy. Usually therapy requires approximately 10 to 20 sessions, if possible on a weekly basis. There are several medications used to treat the symptoms of PTSD, usually including anti-depressants. But there are many new forms of treatment for PTSD that need more research and Israel suggested that a partnership between the public and private sectors could quickly flesh out which ones are more effective and get them institutionalized.

Unfortunately many do not seek treatment for PTSD out of fear it will harm their military careers. Congressman Israel has introduced legislation to address PTSD by authorizing the VA to enter into public-private partnerships to treat and research PTSD. The hope is to develop more treatment options for soldiers and veterans and to overcome the stigma that keeps many returning soldiers from seeking treatment in the first place.